Girls'

EDUCATION

ENHANCING GIRLS' EDUCATION THROUGH COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

Why Should Local Organizations Invest in Girls' Education?

Education of all children is important. Education, especially primary schooling, promotes democracy, economic growth, and social development. The education of all children is important, but investing in the education of girls yields high social and economic returns. Female literacy and schooling have been linked to development gains in both maternal and child health as well as agricultural production.

Despite enormous gains, girls still lag behind boys. Girls are less likely to participate in school than boys because of cultural beliefs about the appropriateness of educating women, family needs and resources, facilities available for girls at schools, and treatment of females in the classroom by teachers and male classmates. Many impediments to girls' enrollment and persistence in school are specific to girls. To increase educational opportunities for girls, programs dedicated to girls must be undertaken.

What are community schools?

Community schools are community-based and community-managed educational facilities and programs. Because community schools are developed, organized, and managed from within the community, they typically have:

- local support;
- innovative partnerships among government, private organizations, and communities;
- locally relevant, child-centered curricula and teaching; and
- increased opportunities for girls' education at sustainable cost.

Community schools are successful in many countries: Bangladesh, Colombia, Egypt, Guatemala, Malawi, and Mali all provide examples. While the names of their respective programs differ — Bangladesh Rural Action Committee (BRAC) Schools, *Escuela Nueva Unitaria*, community schools, and village-based schools — these communities, with assistance from local organizations, have organized to provide quality basic education for their children.

Egypt

In many of the "esbah" or hamlets of Upper Egypt, there are few community services. Schools are far away and parents are reluctant to let their children, particularly girls, walk long distances on their own. Fewer than 10 percent of the girls in these communities attend public schools. In 1992, UNICEF in partnership with local communities, women's nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and the Government of Egypt established several community schools. The program reflects principles of child learning and development but also seeks to develop community participation and to increase the capacity of teachers. The program began in four communities and have grown to serve about 3,000 children, most of whom are girls, in over 100 villages. The communities operate all the schools.

To enhance communication between the community and school, local young women are recruited and trained to be facilitators. These young women not only become more involved in the community, but they also experience personal growth and learning. Evaluations of the program demonstrate that children in the community schools have higher learning achievement than children in government schools. Evaluations also show that communities are actively engaged in supporting the schools. In addition, the program stimulates a positive policy dialogue with the Ministry of Education and focus on basic education, particularly where it is supportive of girls (Hartwell 1995).

Mali

Mali's community-school project, which the U.S. Agency for International Development and the Save the Children Federation supported, consisted of local school management, local teachers and teacher training, local language instruction, and parity in girls' participation. Evaluations of the program revealed that the level of learning in the community schools matched that in government schools in arithmetic and was better in reading and writing of the local language (Muskin 1977).

Why are community schools important for girls' education?

Community schools are important because they help to overcome some of the major barriers to girls' education, including distance, family demands, costs, and cultural beliefs. Eliminating obstacles will increase girls' participation in education.

Distance. In rural communities the distance from home to school is often a significant barrier to girls' education. Although the physical distance may be only three to five kilometers, the walk often involves leaving the protection of the family and the immediate community to cross fields and enter a different community. The distance poses risks to girls, risks that many families do not wish to have them confront. Even where the danger of abuse is slight, cultural values of propriety may prevent girls from traveling unescorted far from home. Community schools allow families to provide an

education for girls within the safety of their own community — under their own control.

Family demands. Families often rely on girls' help with younger children, in the family garden, carrying water, household cleaning, and chores. School attendance may be considered impractical because girls have such a critical role in the family. One characteristic of community schools is that their schedules are flexible and are designed to accommodate demands on students' time. This flexibility does not prevent community schools from providing as much instructional time as do public schools.

Cost of schooling. Even when official policy provides "free" education, the cost of schooling can be substantial. Parents often pay for notebooks and pencils, a school uniform, and special contributions and fees, such as for sports and special events. Poor, rural families with many children are often unable to spend what little money they have to pay school expenses for their girls. External financial help can support community schools. Communities, however, contribute substantially and "own" the school. Community schools seek to place little financial burden on parents. For example, in one program children of parents who are not able to afford fees are supported through a fund created by an NGO and managed by the schools' community-based administrators.

Cultural beliefs. Families often do not see school as relevant to girls. Many families view schooling as a way of escaping a hard rural life for work and riches in a town. This is generally seen as a more likely path for a boy than a girl. Often the cultural pressure for a girl is to find a good, early marriage. In forming community schools, the community is consulted through a process that respects its beliefs, its culture, and its aspirations for its children. The goal of this process is to assess the current situation and expectations and to develop a common purpose related to children's well being and education. The content of community schools is specifically related to the children's environment, culture, and experience, with emphasis placed on basic literacy and numeracy.

Community schools have made a difference in many communities. They have increased girls' and boys' access to education. By leading the effort to develop a community school, your organization can make a positive impact on the lives of your community's boys and girls.

Designing and implementing a community school

Developing a community school is not difficult. There are many experiences that can serve as guides and make a community school a success. Once the initial decision to start a community school has been made, several steps must be taken. The following guidelines serve as a checklist for implementing a community-school program that will promote increased girls' participation in quality basic education, but there is no blueprint for establishing effective community-managed schools. The suggestions made here reflect experience and research in a variety of settings and countries but should be adjusted to local and national political, economic, social, and cultural contexts. ***Starting small to maximize learning and building support systems as the program expands works best.***

Here are some questions that should be asked about the design and operation of a community school.

- What will be the school's goals and purposes?
- How will support for the community school be developed and sustained?

- What will be the roles of the participating organizations in designing and operating the school?

- Where will the community school be established?

- How will teachers be selected and trained?

- What and how will students be taught?

- How much time will be required to establish and operate a community school?

- How much will the school cost to construct, operate, and maintain?

What will be the school's goals and purposes?

The first step in designing a community school is to define goals. The fundamental goal of a community school is usually to ensure education for children from rural areas by mobilizing various social and economic sectors to establish and support the school.

Community involvement is critical to the success of community schools, so key members of the community from all sectors should be involved in the definition of the program's goals. They should be consulted through a process that respects their beliefs, culture, and the community's aspirations for its children. In programs across the world, what the school "means" has been defined by different voices within the community (elders and leaders, women, men, children, property holders, etc.). Using their help to assess the current situation and expectations and to develop a common purpose related to children's education will contribute to the school's successful creation and operation. Defining the goals and purposes of the community school with community members who are involved is essential for success.

How will support for the community school be developed and sustained?

Work in collaboration with the community. In addition to the relationships already established in the community, organizations should develop or strengthen relationships and collaboration with local NGOs, other community members, and the ministry of education. Successful community school programs grow from the culture and the people they serve, drawing on experience from other settings when appropriate. Community members are the most knowledgeable resource that administrators will have on positive and negative issues facing the community school. This resource is critical for the success of the community school and can be mobilized to build support. For example, in Balochistan, in Pakistan, community workers go door to door, urging parents to form an association to build a community school. In each of the villages, education committees are created that are responsible for selecting a site for the school, identifying potential teachers, and monitoring teacher attendance and student enrollment.

What will be the roles of the participating organizations in designing and implementing a community school?

Many sectors of a country's educational system are involved in the implementation of a community school, including:

- the initiating organization;

- the ministry of education;
- the NGO contracted to operate the community school; and
- the community.

Possible Roles of Organizations in Community Schools

Initiating organization	Provide technical leadership in design and implementation. Organize and finance: • outside consultants with knowledge of community schools • contracts with NGOs to manage the project, specifications for school facilities, furnishing, and equipment • staff training (of ministry of education and NGOs) • supplementary instructional materials for teachers and children • design for the assessment of pupil learning and project evaluation
Ministry of Education	Provide policy guidelines that legitimize the community schools. Provide financing for: • teaching staff • instructional materials and supplies Provide guidance and assistance on curriculum objectives and approaches. Participate in training, supervision, and evaluation.
NGO(s)	Manage community schools within each district: • appoint management and technical staff (manager, trainers, supervisors, community liaison staff, carpenters, materials developers) • consult with communities, select communities, work with communities • organize preservice and ongoing training and support to communities and teachers
Communities	Establish a school committee to guide school development. Consult with parents to ensure full participation. Provide land and classroom facilities. Renovate or build, if necessary. Seek support of local authorities when necessary. Participate in the selection of school staff. Support the school's development and maintenance.

Where will the community school be established?

Identifying the target population is key in the design of a community school. Community schools are provided in villages that do not have regular public schools because they are small, poor, or disadvantaged. Depending on a country's social and cultural structure, certain groups (for example, minority and indigenous people, or those who are especially disadvantaged) will require special support. Girls from such groups require priority access to community schools.

Prior to selecting a target community, it may be necessary to assess socioeconomic and educational needs. To identify the neediest communities, organizations can use census information, data from the Ministry of Education, and information about critical poverty zones. Overall, those selecting target communities must consider the:

- socioeconomic conditions of families;
- school-aged population by gender;
- existing access to schools;
- low female enrollment rates in primary schools; and
- geographic proximity to the implementing organization.

Select communities that select themselves. When deciding where to start, it is useful to consider the community's enthusiasm for education. Selecting communities that are motivated will produce the best results. Once the preliminary selection of the communities is completed, it is important to enlist community support and acceptance of the program.

How will teachers be selected and trained?

Teachers in community schools are normally recruited from and selected by the local communities. In successful community schools, these teachers are provided practical, hands-on, preservice training, with an emphasis on learning through observation and interaction. They are then provided regular, initially weekly, in-service training and supervision to develop their skills and knowledge. The teacher-training efforts of community schools, when not provided through a ministry of education, are frequently contracted to a local educational organization, such as an NGO. This local organization provides training, materials, supervision, and management. Educational experts in the community or the Ministry of Education can be used for assistance in developing a quality educational program.

What and how will students be taught?

A good community school is, above all else, a good school. A sound educational environment consists of:

- active, child-centered learning methods;
- developmentally appropriate curriculum and materials;
- a focus on many subjects, including reading and mathematics; and
- a developmentally appropriate assessments of student progress.

Education at a community school is rooted in a child's environment, culture, and experience and emphasizes mastery of basic literacy and numeracy. In order for a community school to be successful, it must offer a quality educational environment that includes:

- engaging learning materials;
- the design and organization of furniture that supports group learning;
- opportunities for children to write and be creative in the classroom;
- methods engaging children in group projects both within the classroom and in/with the community; and
- the use of school councils and youth committees to organize and support activities.

The Core Values of Egypt's Community Schools

Children come first: our purposes and actions should always be seen in relation to the children's well being and learning.

The teacher is a learner, as is the child.

Supervisors and managers are *not* the experts: they support the teacher, who supports the child.

We build on strengths not weaknesses: our starting point is what the child knows, what the teacher can do, *not* what she cannot do.

We work in teams, supporting each other, to improve pupils' learning.

The focus of change is the relationship between the teacher and the children and the children's learning. Thus we must strive constantly to understand better and know what the child is learning: skills, personal growth, and social relations.

How much time is required to establish and operate a community school?

Once a decision is made to create a community school, it can open within a year. In the first four months, it is crucial to establish a policy environment in which ministry and local officials view the project with favor. This requires a considerable investment of time and effort by the project leadership in engaging in community dialogue and selection and examining how regulations, financing, and management will support and not undermine the initiative. Project leaders must also ensure that all key actors view the program as a collective effort to provide quality learning for children, and especially girls. During the next four months, the focus turns to establishing a school in the selected community. Typically, in the final four months of the project initiation, instruction begins. Instruction and management of the school are continually monitored with the goal of continuous improvement.

Sample Community School Time Line

Time Frame	Actors	Activities
Months 1-4	Initiating organization Ministry of Education NGO	• Establish policy • Finance project • Establish working policies • Establish contracts • Recruit/appoint core staff • Identify locations, community • Initiate dialogue with community
Months 4-8	Community NGO Initiating organization	• Community establishes committees prepares plans and facilities • Consult with parents, recruit pupils • Select teachers, preservice training • Build furnishing, prepare instructional materials
Months 8-12	Community NGO Initiating organization and MoE	• Schools begin operation • Management system in place • Training/supervision ongoing • Begin second cycle of identifying new communities/partners

How much will the community school cost?

If community schools are to survive, their costs must be comparable to the costs of public schools. This has been the case in other communities where community school programs have taken hold and expanded. From experiences with community schools in Ecuador, Egypt, Bangladesh, and Pakistan, educators learned that it is economically and educationally feasible to establish high-quality, publicly supported schools in poor, rural areas. Although per-pupil costs in the community schools tend to be between 10 and 25 percent higher than in public schools, reduced repetition and drop-out and increased achievement mean that the community schools are more efficient and cost-effective. The financing of community schools seeks to place little burden on parents.

There are three main types of costs associated with community schools:

Start-up costs — the costs necessary to establish a school at a new site. For the community schools, this includes identifying and surveying areas and communities; conducting community consultations; providing the land, materials, and labor to build or renovate a new school/classroom; recruiting and training teachers and support staff; and providing school furnishings and libraries.

Maintenance costs — the costs necessary to maintain a school. For the community schools, this includes teacher salaries, instructional materials, maintenance of facilities and furnishing, and administrative and supervisory costs.

Research and development costs — the costs required to establish a knowledge base, build organizational and personnel capacity, and develop political, technical, and bureaucratic support. For community schools, this includes exploratory field research; use of local and international consultants to adapt prior research and experience to local contexts; planning, field testing, consultations, advocacy, and networking. At the outset of a program, these costs represent the major share of expenditures. For long-term growth, these costs should represent at least 10-15 percent of all recurrent expenditures.

Category	Percentage total cost	Sample*	
		Per school	Per child
NGO			
Salaries	30-45	$809	$27
Training	3-5	$69	$3
Travel and transportation	5-10	$166	$5
Other direct costs	10-15	$380	$13
Monitoring and evaluation	5	--	--
Administrative costs	5-10	$141	$4
Ministry of Education		--	--
Facilitators	MoE	$410	$14
Curriculum, materials/texts, and school snacks	MoE	$178	$7
Supervision	MoE	$67	$2
Total Costs		$2,220	$75

* Based on a network of 20 community schools in the Community School Project in Egypt, a cooperative program of UNICEF and the Ministry of Education. Financing from Ministry of Education (MOE) for facilitators' salaries (community school teachers), curriculum materials/texts, and supervision. (Hartwell, 1995)

Program monitoring and evaluation

Program monitoring and evaluation should be incorporated into the planning of a community school project and included as a permanent design feature. Monitoring is first related to the accomplishment of planned activities, that is, the level of efficiency achieved in implementation. The principal focus must be analysis of inputs, implementation of the program, and participation of the school, committees, community, and other stakeholders. It is necessary to develop a manageable, simple, and permanent system of reporting.

The monitoring process also involves the analysis of the inputs necessary to achieve program objectives. The initiating organization or NGO may accomplish this analysis through appropriate communication among different actors in the program, the school committee, parents, teachers and Ministry of Education staff, program managers, decision-makers, and donor agencies.

Finally, the monitoring process also evaluates results and objectives in terms of the target population: the girls. The implementing NGO can analyze indicators of access, efficiency, and quality — that is, enrollment, retention, repetition, promotion, completion, academic achievement, and participation.

The following are principles in community school monitoring and evaluation:

- the development and implementation of a simple, efficient, and inexpensive information system is required; and

- the control of intervening variables is necessary to avoid confounding of results.

Uses of the information obtained through monitoring and evaluation include:

- administrative use to improve implementation;
- consciousness-raising to gain support for the program (donors, politicians, teachers, communities, etc.) and to motivate parents to send their girls to school; and
- decision-making on program duration, areas of expansion, and other modifications.

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